

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
For the Montana National Register of Historic Places Program and State Antiquities Database

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
Montana Historical Society
PO Box 201202, 1410 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **26 9th Street South**

Historic Address (if applicable): **827 1st Avenue**

City/Town: **Great Falls**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Cascade**

Historic Name: **Bennett Motors**

Original Owner(s): **Bennett-Pontiac Motor Inc.**

Current Ownership ☒ Private ☐ Public

Current Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Owner(s): **Block 360 Limited Partnership**

Owner Address: **26 9th Street South**
Great Falls

Phone:

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **20N** Range: **3E**

NW ¼ SW ¼ NE ¼ of Section: **12**

Lot(s): **8-12**

Block(s): **360**

Addition: **Unknown** Year of Addition: **Unknown**

USGS Quad Name: **Northwest Great Falls** Year:
1965 updated 1994

Historic Use: **Auto showroom & repair**

Current Use: **Auto showroom & repair**

Construction Date: **1948** ☐ Estimated ☒ Actual

☒ Original Location ☐ Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov/topofinder2

☐ NAD 27 ☒ NAD 83 (preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **477965** Northing: **5261262**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Date of this document: **April 26, 2010**

Form Prepared by: **Diana J. Painter, PhD**

Address: **3518 N. C Street, Spokane, WA 99205**

Daytime Phone: **(707) 364-0697**

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP: ☒ yes ☐ no

Criteria: ☒ A ☒ B ☐ C ☐ D

Date: 11/16/2010

Evaluator: Kate Hampton

Comments:

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Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

X See Additional Information Page

Architectural Style: **Vernacular** If Other, specify: **Streamline Moderne (influences)**

Property Type: **Commercial** Specific Property Type: **Auto showroom**

Architect: **Melvin A. Nelson** Architectural Firm/City/State: **Melvin A. Nelson, Chicago, IL**

Builder/Contractor: **Unknown** Company/City/State:

Source of Information: **2002 survey**

Setting and location. Bennett Motors is a two-story building (one story with a mezzanine), with an L-shaped footprint and a flat roof. It is located at 26 9th Street South in Great Falls, at the corner of 1st Avenue South and 9th Street South on the block bounded by Central Avenue on the north; 9th Street South on the east; 1st Avenue South on the south; and 8th Street South on the west. The building is located in the southeast quarter of this block and faces east onto 9th Street South. It appears that uses related to Bennett Motors take up much of this block; an east-west alley separates this building from the adjacent car sales lot and building to the north.

Materials. Most of the building is clad in brick. The type of construction is unknown. Additional construction materials on the building include decorative concrete masonry units (CMU), plain CMU, corrugated metal and hollow clay brick. Window frames include anodized aluminum, steel, and wood. Pedestrian door frames include anodized aluminum and wood. There is one wood overhead door on the site; other overhead doors are metal (insulated aluminum). The building has a concrete foundation and a built-up roof. It is a Modern structure with Streamline Moderne influences in the rounded corners on the main showroom. It was constructed in 1948.

The brick cladding and details on the building are particularly interesting and unusual. The building has a crenellated brick coping formed by angled soldier and header courses in a dark brick that contrasts with the light tan brick on the main body of the building. Additional decorative detailing is provided by panels of dark brick headers in variegated tones that project from the face of the building above the windows and doors on the public faces of the building on the south and east facades. A soldier course of dark brick continues around the building at the height of the showroom windows and garage doors, emphasizing the horizontal aspect of the building. A course of the dark brick that has been glazed occurs at the base of the building.

Massing and design. The building has two major components, the showroom, which projects from the main body of the building and has rounded corners and a continuous window wall; and the main body of the building, which is rectilinear and was historically used for car repair. The openings, materials and form of the building apparently corresponded to the different uses in the interior. This is still the case today, as renovations and changes have been made over time to meet current needs.

East façade. The east façade is the public façade of the building. On the south end of the east façade is a window wall that extends around all sides of this projecting wing. It is most notable for having small-radius rounded corners where this wing meets the street at 9th Street South. The windows have three, fixed lights, the middle light being nearly the height of the door. There is an entry door in the center of the eastern-most portion, and at the corner where this wing abuts the auto-repair wing. The Doors have full-height glass with two-light sidelights and transom windows. Windows and doors are framed in anodized aluminum.

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Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The east façade on the auto repair portion of the building has two taller openings on the south end. These have overhead metal doors with three lights each. The next two bays, which are shorter, have been infilled with storefront windows and doors of anodized aluminum. These bays are covered by an awning. The next three bays have been infilled with decorative concrete screens. The last bay has been infilled with a door and windows with wood frames and full-height glass. The entry here is raised above the curb, and extends under the face of the bay's brick opening.

South façade. The south façade of the building fronts on 1st Avenue South. Visible on the right (east) side of this façade are the showroom windows, which continue in six bays along this side. Continuing west are four large, horizontally-oriented windows, two at ground level and two above, that have fixed and casement windows with anodized frames. Next are four smaller, slightly vertically-oriented windows with single fixed lights. The next two openings are pedestrian doors, one placed at street level and a larger one set slightly higher. To the left of these doors is a contemporary overhead door with three lights. Above and flanking this door is two tall, six-light steel windows with awning-style sash.

To the left of this ensemble are a storefront with two full-height fixed lights and a door with a sidelight and transom, all in anodized aluminum. The next portion of the building is in the 1966 addition and is a carwash. It has two tall, overhead doors with three lights each. The brick here – both the cladding and trim – are a different color than that on the main face of the building. All windows on this façade have brick sills and all openings appear to be original to the building.

West façade. The west façade of the building has no openings but for a tall, multiple-light wood garage door with a pedestrian door with a narrow fixed light next to it, slightly north of center. This façade is clad in contemporary corrugated metal. It has a wide band of plywood or masonite affixed to the building at the level of the garage door.

North façade. The north building façade has a 'notch' at the northeast corner. The north wall within this notch is clad in contemporary corrugated metal and features an overhead garage door. This is accessed via a concrete ramp (this is the other end of the car wash). Adjacent to this notch is a lower portion of the main building that has two large, multi-light steel sash windows on the west and south facades. The building here is finished in concrete below the window sills, and hollow clay brick above. The building corners and window openings are finished in solid brick with a striated finish.

The rest of the building in this location is the height of the main portion of the building, and is finished in dark brick banding characteristic of the building. Off center on this portion of the building is an overhead garage door with three small lights that is recessed from the main façade. It is accessed via a concrete ramp. Flanking this are two large, Multi-light steel sash windows of similar proportions as the windows at the rear corner. Above the garage door is another smaller multi-light steel sash window. This portion of the façade is also finished in hollow core brick with a board-formed concrete wall below the window sills.

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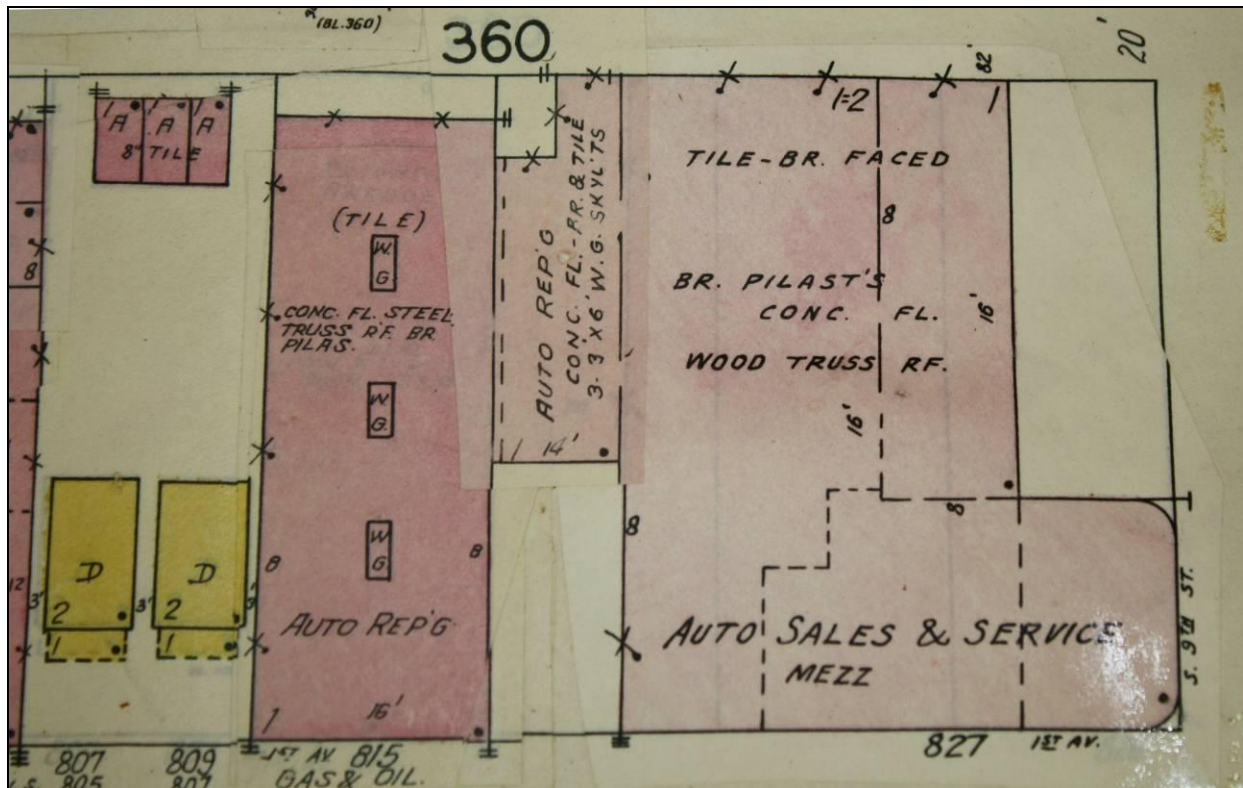
Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Signage. The signage on the site has changed over time. Today a tall pole sign is located in the open space on the east side of the property. A blade sign that was located on the northeast corner of the building historically is no longer extant. A sign affixed to the main showroom has the same form that it did historically, but has a slightly modified logo. There is a blade sign at the carwash on the southwest corner of the building.

Changes over time. Historical photographs show that originally all the bays along the east façade of the building north of the showroom were car repair bays and were either open or had overhead doors. Today all of these bays except the two southernmost bays have been enclosed with various materials and the two southernmost bays have contemporary overhead doors. It also appears that as late as 1986 the window frames in the showroom were aluminum and the windows themselves had full-height glass; today they are dark-colored anodized aluminum. The cladding on the west, rear façade has been added, as this is a contemporary corrugated metal.



Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Bennett Motors, 1957

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Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

☒ See Additional Information Page

History of the building. The Bennett Motors building was constructed in 1948 at a cost of \$38,000 (*Helms, 2002*). Sanborn Fire Insurance maps show that the building was built in at least three stages. The 1950 Sanborn map shows the original L-shaped building, which consisted of the two-story building (one story with a mezzanine) that wrapped around the one-story portion which represented the repair bays on the east side of the building. By 1957 an addition housing an auto repair shop had been added at the northwest corner of the building. Today an additional structure is located south of this building, to infill the lot to the property line along 9th Street South (according to the 2002 survey this occurred in 1966).

The previous survey of the building was conducted in 2002. At that time, it was noted that building changes took place in 1962 (interior remodel), 1966 (addition), 1967 (mezzanine constructed) and 1978 (re-roof).

History of the business. Bennett Motors got its start in 1916 as Pierse Auto Company, located at 307 1st Avenue North in Great Falls, where Carroll Bennett, the founder of Bennett Motors, sold Oakland and Chevrolet cars. Carroll Bennett was from an established Great Falls family; his parents moved to Great Falls in 1902. The only time that Carroll was not involved in the auto business was when he managed a zinc and lead mining operation on his parent's property in Niehart, Montana during World War II (*information on file, Cascade County Historical Society, accessed April 2010*).

INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

☐ See Additional Information

Page

"As Friendly as Yesterday," (Ad), *Great Falls Tribune*, April 14, 1985.

"Bennett Motors" <http://www.bennettmotors.com/dealership/about.htm> downloaded April 26, 2010.

"Businesses," and "Transportation" files, Cascade County Historical Society, accessed April 2010.

"Celebrating our 50th Anniversary," (Ad), *Great Falls Tribune*, January 16, 1966.

Karen Dodge and Sara E. Polster, *Portage Park National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, November 1994.

Helms, Candi and Amy Hinshaw, "Bennett Motors," *Cascade County-Montana Architectural and Historical Inventory*. On file, Montana State Office of Historic Preservation, accessed April 2010.

Peters, Linda, *Motor Row Historic District, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, July 16, 2002.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1929 updated to 1950; 1929 re-published in 1957.

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Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

Bennett established his own dealership in 1929 as "Bennett Nash." He began to distribute Pontiacs in 1939, GMC truck in 1958, Subaru in 1972, and Buick in 1995, and expanded to include Budget Rent-A-Car services in 1998. He constructed the present building in 1948 as a showroom and repair location. It is still used as a showroom, but the business has expanded to include a lot to the north of this building, as well as several other locations in the area. There appears to be no repair business at this location; several of the bays have been filled in with storefronts.

Carroll was joined by his son Dick Bennett in the late 1950s and retired from active management in 1962. His son is now president of Bennett Motors and Dick Bennett's daughter Cari Yturri is sales manager.

The architect. The architect for the building was Melvin A. Nelson (b. 1883) of Chicago, Illinois (*Helms, 2002*). It is not known how Nelson came to design the building. He practiced in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s. Among the commissions that he is known to have been involved in are three residential structures in the Chicago area; the design of the gymnasium for Portage Park in Chicago, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; and the design of the Locomobile-Auburn Auto Showroom, which is today a part of the Motor Row National Register Historic District in Chicago (*Peters, 2002*). The Locomobile building is now used for residential lofts.



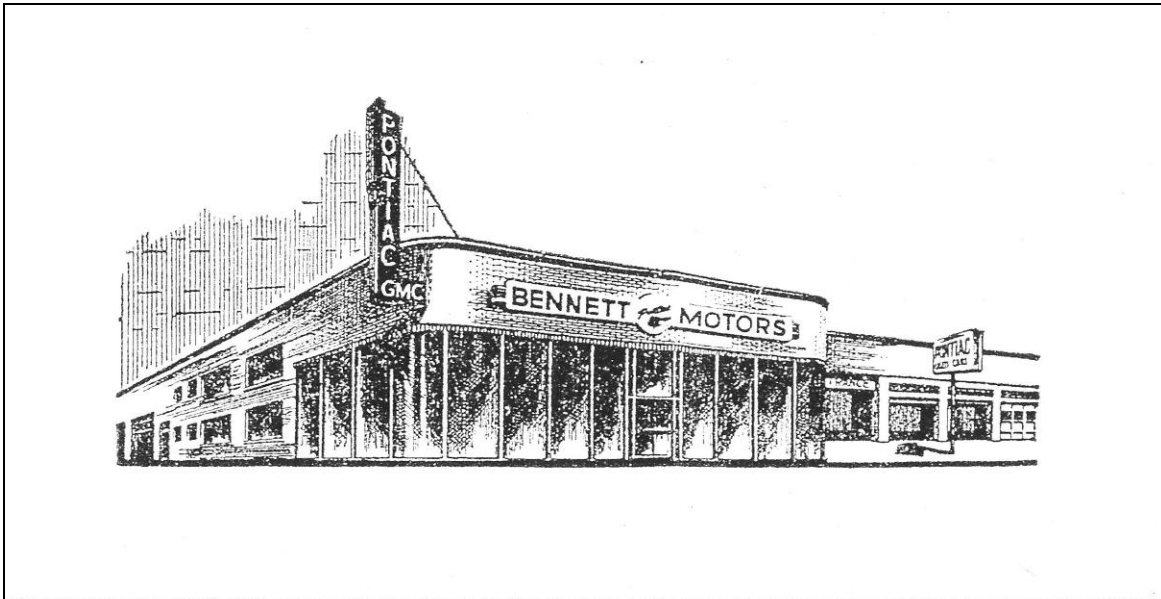
Bennett Motors in 1948

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OFFICE, SERVICE, PARTS, NEW CAR & TRUCK SALE
Corner Ninth Street and First Avenue South

Bennett Motors when opened, with historic signage



Bennett Motors in 1986 (note aluminum-frame windows)

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Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NRHP Listing Date:

NRHP Eligibility: ☒ Yes ☐ No ☒ Individually ☐ Contributing to Historic District ☐ Noncontributing to Historic District

NRHP Criteria: ☒ A ☒ B ☐ C ☐ D

Area of Significance: **Commerce** Period of Significance: **1948-1966**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

☐ See Additional Information Page

The following statement of significance is taken from the 2002 survey of this building.

"This property is significant because it was owned by Carroll R. Bennett, early day rancher and car salesman. In 1919, Bennett was ranching outside of Great Falls and working as a salesman for Frank Bates and Harvey Nobel, managers of City Auto Co. at 409 1st Ave. So. He also worked for the Pierce Auto Co. at 307 First Avenue North as a floorman, partsman, salesman, and bookkeeper at night. In 1929, Bennett purchased City Auto (Garage) and formed the Bennett Pontiac Motors Inc. Bennett's [sic] is the oldest, longest running and continuous automobile business in Great Falls.

In 1948, Bennett had this brick and tile 100 foot by 150 foot building constructed for \$38,000 as Bennett Motors. The 22,500 square foot business offered auto sales, repairs, and services. The interior was remodeled in 1963 and 4 years later a \$14,000 addition was added to the garage. In 1967, a balcony was constructed, and in 1978 the building was reroofed" (*Helms, 2002:1*).

This is a modest, vernacular structure with some interesting brick work. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type; that is, a mid-century auto showroom/auto repair building. However, this author believes that the integrity of this aspect of the building is insufficient to qualify it for listing under Criterion C, for its architectural values. It is recommended here as significant under Criteria A and B.

INTEGRITY

☐ See Additional Information Page

The Bennett Motors building retains integrity of location, setting, workmanship and association. It does not retain integrity of design, materials, or feeling. The change of use in the building from auto showroom and repair to simply an auto showroom has resulted in the addition of storefronts and other features that are not consistent with the original appearance of the building. A number of materials have also been introduced that undermine the feeling of the building, or its expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. However, the building retains sufficient integrity to be considered historically significant for its association with the founder of Bennett Motors, Carroll Bennett.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**



Description: **North (side) and east (front) facades of building**



Description: **East (front) and south (side) facades of building**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**



Description: **West (rear) and south (side) facades of building**



Description: **North (side) façade of building, viewed from alley**

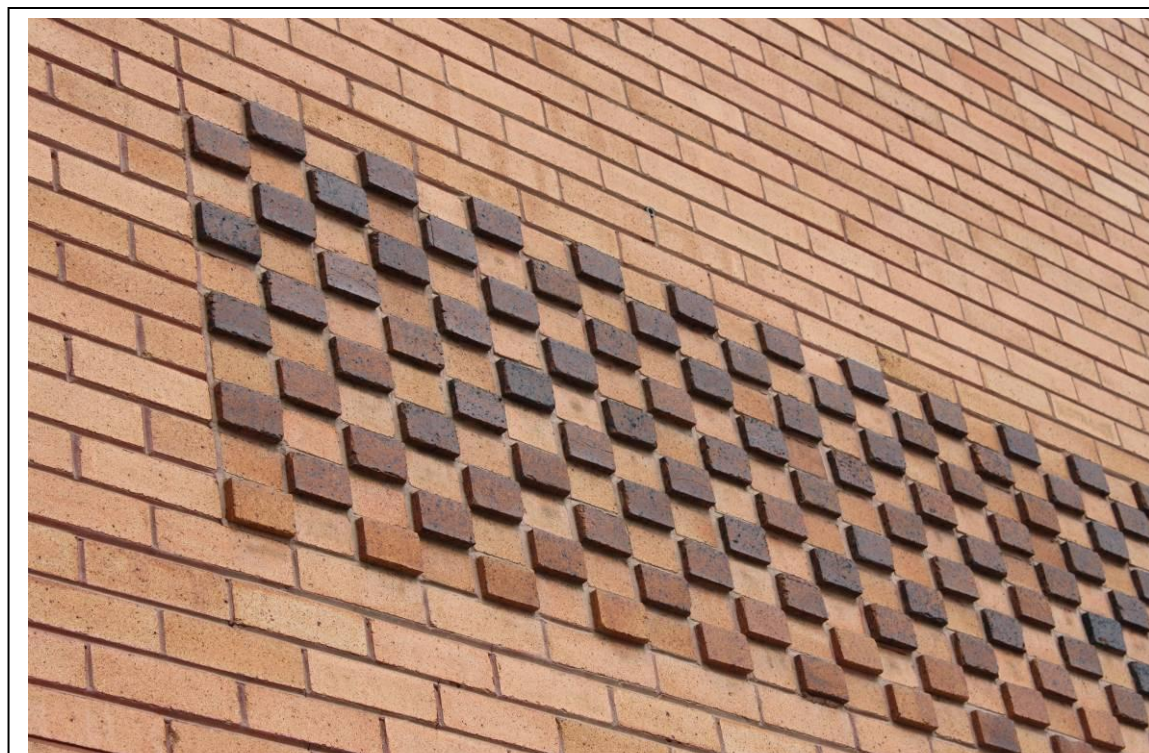
MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**



Description: **Showroom, viewed from northeast**

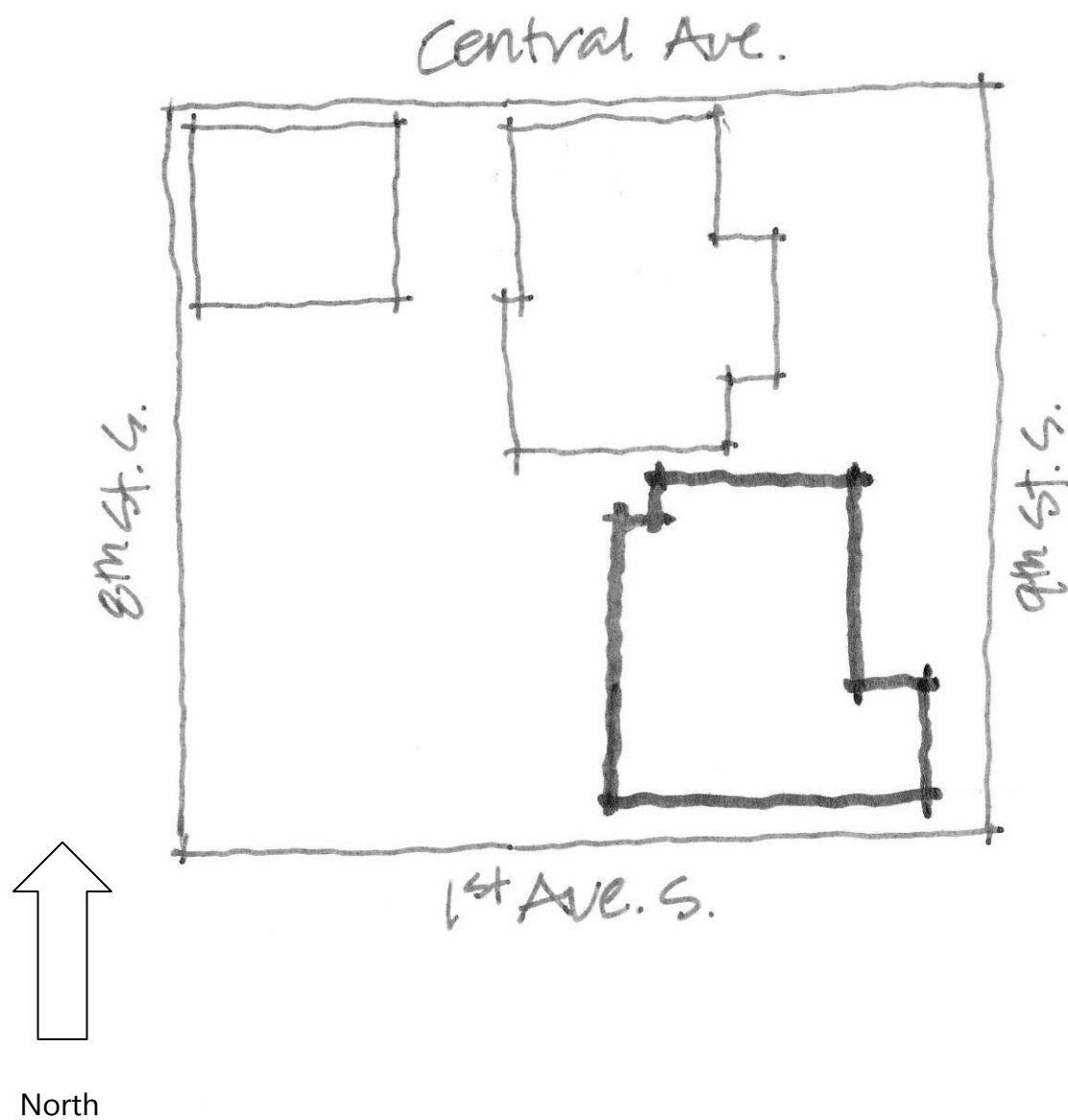


Description: **Detail of brickwork**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
SITE MAP

Property Name: **Bennett Motors**

Site Number: **24 CA 1528**



MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

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